

Coolidge Cup Declamation Qualifier

Official Speech Excerpt Packet for 2023

(Choose one excerpt to declaim on video)



Have Faith in Massachusetts (Excerpt)

Boston, Massachusetts · January 7, 1914

Honorable Senators:

The commonwealth is one. We are all members of one body. The welfare of the weakest and the welfare of the most powerful are inseparably bound together. Industry cannot flourish if labor languish. Transportation cannot prosper if manufactures decline. The general welfare cannot be provided for in any one act, but it is well to remember that the benefit of one is the benefit of all, and the neglect of one is the neglect of all. The suspension of one man's dividends is the suspension of another man's pay envelope.

Men do not make laws. They do but discover them. Laws must be justified by something more than the will of the majority. They must rest on the eternal foundation of righteousness. That state is most fortunate in its form of government which has the aptest instruments for the discovery of laws.

Courts are established, not to determine the popularity of a cause, but to adjudicate and enforce rights. No litigant should be required to submit his case to the hazard and expense of a political campaign. No judge should be required to seek or receive political rewards. The courts of Massachusetts are known and honored wherever men love justice. Let their glory suffer no diminution at our hands. The electorate and judiciary cannot combine. A hearing means a hearing. When the trial of causes goes outside the court room, Anglo Saxon constitutional government ends.

The people cannot look to legislation generally for success. Industry, thrift, character, are not conferred by act or resolve. Government cannot relieve from toil. It can provide no substitute for the rewards of service. It can, of course, care for the defective and recognize distinguished merit. The normal must care for themselves. Self-government means self-support.

Man is born into the universe with a personality that is his own. He has a right that is founded upon the constitution of the universe to have property that is his own. Ultimately, property rights and personal rights are the same thing. The one cannot be preserved if the other be violated. Each man is entitled to his rights and the rewards of his service be they never so large or never so small.

Have faith in Massachusetts. In some unimportant detail some other States may surpass her, but in the general results, there is no place on earth where the people secure, in a larger measure, the blessings of organized government, and nowhere can those functions more properly be termed self-government.

Do the day's work. If it be to protect the rights of the weak, whoever objects, do it. If it be to help a powerful corporation better to serve the people, whatever the opposition, do that. Expect to be called a stand-patter, but don't be a stand-patter. Expect to be called a demagogue, but don't be a demagogue. Don't hesitate to be as revolutionary as science. Don't hesitate to be as

reactionary as the multiplication table. Don't expect to build up the weak by pulling down the strong. Don't hurry to legislate. Give administration a chance to catch up with legislation.

We need a broader, firmer, deeper faith in the people; A faith that men desire to do right, that the Commonwealth is founded upon a righteousness which will endure, a reconstructed faith that the final approval of the people is given not to demagogues, slavishly pandering to their selfishness, merchandising with the clamor of the hour, but to statesmen, ministering to their welfare, representing their deep, silent, abiding convictions.

For context and for reference, [the full speech is available here](#).

Note also that this excerpt retains original spellings, which in some cases differ from modern spellings.

The Reign of Law (Excerpt)

Washington, D.C. · May 30, 1925

[...] [P]eople are given to thinking and speaking of the National Government as “the Government.” They demand more from it than it was ever intended to provide; and yet in the same breath they complain that Federal authority is stretching itself over areas which do not concern it. On one side, there are demands for more amendments to the Constitution. On the other, there is too much opposition to those that already exist.

Without doubt, the reason for increasing demands on the Federal Government is that the States have not discharged their full duties. Some have done better and some worse, but as a whole they have not done all they should. So demand has grown up for a greater concentration of powers in the Federal Government. If we will fairly consider it, we must conclude that the remedy would be worse than the disease. What we need is not more Federal government but better local government. Yet many people who would agree to this have large responsibility for the lapses of local authority.

From every position of consistency with our system, more centralization ought to be avoided. The States would protest, promptly enough, anything savoring of Federal usurpation. Their protection will lie in discharging the full obligations that have been imposed on them. Once the evasion of local responsibilities becomes a habit, there is no knowing how far the consequences may reach. Every step in such a progression will be unfortunate alike for States and Nation. The country needs, in grappling with the manifold problems of these times, all the courage, intelligence, training, and skill that can be enlisted in both State and national administrations.

One insidious practice which sugar-coats the dose of Federal intrusion is the division of expense for public improvements or services between State and National treasuries. The ardent States-rights advocate sees in this practice a vicious weakening of the State system. The extreme federalist is apt to look upon it in cynical fashion as bribing the States into subordination. The average American, believing in our dual-sovereignty system, must feel that the policy of national doles to the States is bad and may become disastrous. We may go on yet for a time with the easy assumption that “if the States will not, the Nation must.” But that way lies trouble. When the National Treasury contributes half, there is temptation to extravagance by the State. We have seen some examples in connection with the Federal contributions to road building. Yet there are constant demands for more Federal contributions. Whenever by that plan we take something from one group of States and give it to another group, there is grave danger that we do an economic injustice on one side and a political injury on the other. We impose unfairly on the strength of the strong, and we encourage the weak to indulge their weakness.

[...]

What America needs is to hold to its ancient and well-charted course.

Our country was conceived in the theory of local self-government. It has been dedicated by long practice to that wise and beneficent policy. It is the foundation principle of our system of liberty. It makes the largest promise to the freedom and development of the individual. Its preservation is worth all the effort and all the sacrifice that it may cost.

It can not be denied that the present tendency is not in harmony with this spirit. The individual, instead of working out his own salvation and securing his own freedom by establishing his own economic and moral independence by his own industry and his own self-mastery, tends to throw himself on some vague influence which he denominates society and to hold that in some way responsible for the sufficiency of his support and the morality of his actions. The local political units likewise look to the States, the States look to the Nation, and nations are beginning to look to some vague organization, some nebulous concourse of humanity, to pay their bills and tell them what to do. This is not local self-government. It is not American. It is not the method which has made this country what it is. We can not maintain the western standard of civilization on that theory. If it is supported at all, it will have to be supported on the principle of individual responsibility. If that principle be maintained, the result which I believe America wishes to see produced inevitably will follow.

There is no other foundation on which freedom has ever found a permanent abiding place. We shall have to make our decision whether we wish to maintain our present institutions, or whether we wish to exchange them for something else. If we permit some one to come to support us, we can not prevent some one coming to govern us. If we are too weak to take charge of our own mortality, we shall not be strong enough to take charge of our own liberty. If we can not govern ourselves, if we can not observe the law, nothing remains but to have some one else govern us, to have the law enforced against us, and to step down from the honorable abiding place of freedom to the ignominious abode of servitude. [...]

For context and for reference, [the full speech is available here](#).

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The Price of Freedom (Excerpt)

Evanston, Illinois · January 21, 1923

In the possession, maintenance, and enjoyment of [the rights secured by the Constitution] the individual has the guarantees of public law. Freedom is secured by every means that legislative ingenuity can provide. There are no class distinctions. The government deals with its citizens on the basis of equality. The high estate of mankind is not disregarded. The government and society provide ever-increasing facilities for education, better living conditions, and around the weak there is thrown the protection of humanitarian legislation. The power to legislate is executed through representative bodies, the greatest safeguards of liberty, chosen directly by the people. The administration of justice has been intrusted to courts as free, impartial, and independent as it is possible for human nature to devise. The ultimate decision of all questions of law and justice rests with the people themselves. They have the complete authority to enlarge or diminish, to support or to overthrow. The government is their government, the laws are their laws, the decisions of the courts are their decisions. All speak with their voice. They are in the possession of complete sovereignty.

Along with the solemn assurance of freedom and equality goes the guarantee of the right of the individual to possess, enjoy, and control the dollar which he earns, and the principle that it shall not be taken away without due process of law. This necessarily goes with any theory of independence or of liberty, which would be only a mockery unless it secured to the individual the rewards of his own effort and industry.

These are the ideals which supply the foundation of American institutions.

[...]

No one would say that existence under these conditions is effortless. Independence is exceedingly exacting, self-control is arduous, self-government is difficult. Always there is the temptation that some element of these should be surrendered in exchange for security and ease. The appeal to passion and prejudice always lies in this direction. The proposal to despoil others of their possessions is a manifestation of the same spirit. This is the reason that to certain of our native-born, and more often to our foreign-born, the American Republic proves a disappointment. They thought that self-government meant the absence of all restraint, that independence meant living without work, and that freedom was the privilege of doing what they wanted to do. It has been a hard lesson for them to learn that self-government is still government, that the rule of the people does not mean absence of authority, that independence means self-support, and that complete freedom means complete obedience to law. They are disappointed more than ever when they learn, as ever they do, that these are so, not because they have been decreed by some body of men, but that they are so by the very nature of things, and all the governments in the world are powerless to change them.

[...]

Of course it would be folly to argue that the people cannot make political mistakes. They can and do make grave mistakes. They know it; they pay the penalty. But compared with the mistakes

which have been made by every kind of autocracy they are unimportant. It is well also that the people have the power to organize for their industrial protection and advantage. Here too there may be serious errors, but here too such errors have been matched by the errors of those charged with the responsibility of management. Oftentimes the inconvenience and loss fall on the innocent. This is all a part of the price of freedom. [...] We cannot have what is good unless we pay the price. Unless the people struggle to help themselves, no one else will or can help them.

[...]

This is very far from saying that civilization can be maintained without any effort, or that the institutions of our government can exist without the exercise of constant vigilance. We have come to our present high estate through toil and suffering and sacrifice. That which was required to produce the present standards of society will ever be required for their maintenance. Unless there is an eternal readiness to respond with the same faith, the same courage, and the same devotion in the defense of our institutions which were exhibited in their establishment, we shall be dispossessed, and others of a sterner fibre will seize on our inheritance. But this is to say that in the teachings of history and in the divine nature of mankind there is every warrant for the profoundest belief that faith and hope are justified and that righteousness will prevail.

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